

## Wilson Junior High School



*"[Professional Development] is going well—people are excited about it. Everybody has the same basic understanding. The kids come in and know what a summary frame is. The majority of the faculty are willing to try."*



### Implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model

#### A. Description of District

Council Bluffs Community School District has 58,173 students. There are three high schools, 2 junior high schools, and fourteen elementary schools.

- A. About the District
- B. Applying the Operating Principles
- C. Professional Development Cycle
- D. Observations About the Site Visit

#### Description of Wilson Jr. High School

Wilson Junior High School serves 702 students. The student population is made up of 602 Caucasian students, 66 Hispanic students, and 20 African American students. Other subgroups are too small to report. Sixty-two percent of the student population is eligible for free and reduced lunch. The junior high school is administered by a principal (Judy ~) and an assistant principal (Joel ~). There are 54.5 staff members, 12 of which are special education teachers. The building is served by two counselors, one media specialist and .5 FTE teacher of English Language Learners (ELL). Loess Hills Area Education Agency provides consultant support.

In the spring of 2005 Wilson was identified as a School in Need of Assistance in the areas of reading and math. Wilson has a written building-level professional development plan.

#### Site Visit

Department of Education staff visited Wilson Junior High on October 10, 2005. The principal and the assistant principal and members of the professional development leadership team were interviewed. Interviews included teachers representing a variety of role groups and the AEA consulting serving the building. Classroom observations were conducted to gather information about the implementation of professional development in the building. In the interviews, Dee ~, Director of Assessment, represented the Council Bluff School District central office.

## B. Iowa Professional Development Model: The Operating Principles

### Focus on Instruction

Under the leadership of Dee ~, Supervisor of Assessment, the Council Bluffs Community School District has been implementing a district-wide professional development initiative titled *Accelerating Student Achievement (ASA)*. The district-wide PD focus is on academic instruction with an emphasis on building teacher repertoire in reading in the content areas and cross-curricular instructional strategies for comprehension. This year each building has identified priority skills to develop and is using the Iowa Professional Development Model to implement selected strategies. At the Jr. High they have studied their data and identified critical areas of student need. Wilson Jr. High has a faculty-wide focus on reading, and the Mathematics Department is also focusing on math. Interviews and classroom observations revealed that the administrators' and teachers' efforts are clearly focused on increasing student achievement through improved instructional practices. The district also has an expectation that all buildings use a data driven, action research approach following the Iowa PD Model.

#### *Focus on Instruction:*

*Principal Judy ~: "We are using common vocabulary. We are talking about instruction more, and students are learning more. We are making steady progress in student achievement. Wilson is going up in reading and math."*

There is a strong focus on instruction, which is reflected in the priorities set for professional development, how the building leadership spends time and energies, and the ongoing commitment of teachers to improve their practice.

### Participative Decision Making

There are two leadership teams functioning in the school with respect to PD. One team deals with school-wide professional development and manages the implementation of the ASA district-wide priority. The other team supports the implementation of literacy strategies. The principal plays an active role on both teams.

The ASA leadership team serves as a communication link among the faculty, by identifying what the teachers need to discuss during weekly professional development sessions. The team is made up of a representative from each of the collaborative teams. Each collaborative team records minutes using the *Study Team Weekly Reflection/Results Log*. The ASA leadership team uses the information from the minutes to develop the agenda for weekly professional development sessions. It appears that this team makes decisions based on anecdotal comments from reflection logs and/or formative data. Active participation of the principal and Lynn ~ of AEA 13 supports the literacy leadership team. Teachers report being uncomfortable with delivering demonstrations to their peers, but the leadership team recognizes the need to be adding more demonstrations. Apparently the primary roles of the ASA leadership team are to keep the faculty informed about planning and to gather input about teachers' impressions about professional development.

#### *Participative Decision Making*

*Dee ~, Supervisor of Assessment, Central Office: "I am proud of our teachers and administrators; they come at it with a genuine belief that the purpose is to help kids. We are trying to change norms, that this is the right thing to do and the kids need it. We have moved beyond "this is my content area and my job is to teach the content. How we operate has changed to a sense of responsibility to cause learning (not to just teach). This has changed how we relate to each other."*

The literacy team is made up of the principal, AEA consultant, literacy specialist, and librarian. At the time of the interview, efforts were underway to add teacher representation to this team. The literacy team functions well, and it routinely uses data to make decisions and sets agendas for training. With the help of the AEA consultant, demonstrations are planned for delivered.

While there are established teams in place to support professional development, much of the governance of professional development appears to be a function of the central office. Many of the decisions about what to study, future steps, analysis of data appears to occur at the central office level. This year more responsibility has been given to the building leadership for focusing on specific needs and designing professional development opportunities to within the building.

### **Simultaneity**

Balancing process, content, and context is critical in any professional development initiative. An example of this balance at Wilson Jr. High is the provision of supports for those students who are struggling to learn. Wilson has students who need extensive support in academic instruction as well as learning supports in the social emotional and affective domains. Systems are in place to address both the academic and social/emotional needs. For example, cooperative learning structures were observed in classroom observations. Cooperative learning methods provide all students and especially struggling students with a learning environment that enables them to participate and experience success.

This school's leadership works hard to balance priorities. Reading literacy has been identified as a priority, but math scores are also a concern. The professional development design was structured in a way that enabled a critical mass of teachers to spend most of their PD time and effort on literacy. The math need was still addressed, but not in a way that created a competing initiative. See the Design section for information about how math was integrated into the professional development efforts.

### **Leadership**

Strong leadership is a noticeable characteristic in this building. The site visit interviews and observations revealed multiple examples of how distributed leadership supports a culture of professional learning in a school. The principal and assistance principal consistently attend professional development events, review and use data about teacher practice and student learning, conduct weekly walkthroughs, and work closely with the professional development leadership team to govern professional development at the building level. Both the principal and assistant principal send a clear message that it is the responsibility of all faculty to accomplish gains in student achievement for each student and that teachers are expected to engage in professional learning. It was evident from the interviews and observations that a culture of professional learning has been established and that teachers are committed to the norm of engaging in collective learning in order to improve student learning.

How the principal and assistant principal collect and use walkthrough data is one example of how they invest their time in PD. As principals conduct weekly walkthroughs, they look for evidence of implementation of professional development strategies. During the DE visit walk through data were shared with the faculty. Data addressing the following questions were shared:

- Are students engaged?
- What is being taught?
- What instructional decisions are being made?

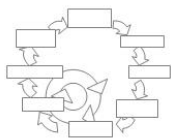
- Are we teaching content aligned with our district's curriculum standards?
- Are we using research-based practices?
- Are we choosing the instructional strategies that will promote student achievement?

The report to teachers included documentation of the professional development strategies that were noticed during the walk through observations.

An indicator of district level support is the allocation of resources. The district provides time and funding for substitute teachers to enable teachers to collaborate and attend training. Central office personnel also plan and deliver training.

AEA support and technical assistance is a critical component of the distributed leadership in this building. Lynn ~ spends one morning a week at Wilson. Consultant services include delivery of training, demonstrations, assistance with team meetings, lesson planning, and data analysis. Lynn provides ongoing guidance to this building regarding the ongoing implementation of the Iowa Professional Development Model and supports other SINA processes for school improvement.

## C. The Professional Development Cycle



As is true of all the schools and districts implementing the Iowa Professional Development Model, Wilson Middle School addressed some components of the PD cycle more thoroughly than others. Wilson's literacy initiative is focused on mastery of reading strategies, the use of collaborative teams to drive their implementation of those strategies, and the study of teacher implementation and student growth. The content area teachers are also focusing on multiple instructional strategies ("Accelerating Student Achievement" or ASA). All faculty have engaged in professional development in the district's ASA program, but the literacy team is working separately this year to implement multiple strategies specific to reading comprehension, vocabulary development and fluency.

### Collecting and Analyzing Student Data

Wilson Middle School has identified reading comprehension as a target for their professional development efforts. In the 2004-2005 academic year, seventh graders at Wilson had a mean National Percentile Rank of 42 on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) while eighth graders were at the 39<sup>th</sup> percentile. Forty percent of 8<sup>th</sup> graders scored below the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile on the ITBS and were thus judged non-proficient in reading comprehension. Eight-eight percent of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students with IEPs were non-proficient in reading and 46% of low socio-economic students were non-proficient.

#### *Collecting and Analyzing Student Data*

*Dee ~, Supervisor of Assessment, Central Office:*

*"Teachers are seeing the purpose of using data, and are now at the point of using the full cycle for using data. They are using data to reteach and adjust their lessons. Data is informing instruction."*

The faculty as a whole has studied the data collected on student reading (the STAR test is also administered at the school) while the Literacy Leadership Team studies student reading data on an ongoing basis.

## Goal Setting

Extensive data analysis at both the district and school levels resulted in the following goal for Wilson's professional development target:

- To make annual improvement in reading comprehension as prescribed by the state trajectory through professional development for literacy teachers specific to the Second Chance Reading state initiative and Literacy Workshop professional learning.
- Additionally, all Wilson teachers will integrate instructional strategies from ASA into classroom instruction to build academic vocabulary.

(The math department is involved in an on-going initiative provided by the Iowa Department of Education – Every Student Counts.)

## Selecting Content

Given the district and school goal of improving reading comprehension, Wilson Middle School selected Second Chance Reading (SCR) as its professional development content. Because only six teachers (as well as the principal, AEA consultant, and district Title I – Language Arts Coordinator) were able to attend the SCR Academy during the summer of 2005, the remaining Language Arts/Reading teachers were trained in Literacy Workshop.

All other content area teachers are continuing their study of Accelerating Student Achievement (ASA) strategies. The school is in its third year of this ongoing initiative.

The research base underlying SCR was provided to the school by the state and overlapped with the research supporting Literacy Workshop. The school consulted the Marzano book *Classroom Instruction that Works* for research supporting the various strategies comprising ASA.

Training for SCR was provided by Beverly Showers through the Iowa Department of Education Summer Academy. Lynn ~, AEA13, is providing training for Literacy Workshop and also supports SCR teachers at the school site. The Council Bluffs Community School District has provided ASA training materials to Wilson as well as all Council Bluffs schools.

## Designing Process for Professional Development

Initial training for SCR teachers was four days in August 2005, and additional days in September, November, and January. At the school site, an additional half day of training was provided on October 3, and teachers have additional assistance weekly of 1 to 1.5 hours. Wilson is extremely fortunate to have an AEA person on site who continues theory sessions, provides in-class demonstrations, and supports collaborative planning. The SCR training meets the criteria laid out in the Iowa Professional Development Model – Theory, Demonstration, Practice, and Collaboration.

### *Designing Process*

*Dee ~, Supervisor of Assessment, Central Office: "We are students of school improvement, of professional development, and of the strategies. We are getting better with what we know we need to do. We need more time and more training on the strategies by trainers."*

Training for Literacy Workshop teachers has included one full day, three half days, and the weekly 1 to 1.5 hours mentioned above for SCR teachers. Literacy Workshop teachers also have time to work collaboratively with peers to develop lessons.



Training for ASA teachers is weekly on Mondays for 90 minutes. Much of the work of this group is revisiting previously introduced strategies and focusing on appropriate use of these strategies in content-area classrooms. ASA teachers also have time to plan collaboratively on a weekly basis.

### On-Going Cycle

The on-going cycle of learning opportunities, collaborative team meetings, the study of implementation, and the analysis of formative student data occur primarily in the structure of Monday morning PD meetings (a late start day for students). All teachers are expected to attend training in learning strategies.

On the day of our visit, all teachers and administrators met in the library to hear a presentation on “Walkthrough” data. The literacy team then adjourned to a separate venue, where both SCR and Literacy Workshop teachers studied an article on the use of embedded questions to encourage metacognition in struggling readers. The two literacy groups then split and worked as separate collaborative teams to develop lessons. The larger ASA group remained in the library for sharing, discussion and problem solving re: the use of ASA strategies. This was a typical Monday morning.

**Collaboration and Implementation** Structures for collaboration are completely built in to the schools schedule. All teachers have time on Monday morning for training and/or planning time. Every teacher is assigned to a collaborative team and the PD and Literacy Leadership Teams prepare agendas for each meeting. Planning for the ASA group is done well in advance – teams know at least a month in advance if they are responsible for sharing lessons or data with the entire group.

SCR collaborative teams spend the bulk of their collective time in developing lessons (Think Alouds, etc.), followed closely by three-week lesson planning and study of student work. Literacy Workshop teachers follow a similar structure in their collaborative teams.

ASA collaborative teams are job-alike (departmental) and include special education teachers. The bulk of their time is spent in sharing and planning strategies all will focus on in the coming weeks. No joint development of lessons was observed in the ASA collaborative teams.

Although administrators and other support staff are willing to cover classes for teachers who wish to observe other classrooms, teachers are not yet taking advantage of this opportunity in large numbers. The presence of a literacy trainer who is willing and able to provide classroom demonstrations relieves the pressure on teachers to get out and see additional demonstrations from their peers.

Second Chance Reading teachers have a very clear implementation plan and a process for monitoring their implementation. Three-week plans are developed in collaborative teams for all teachers in the team; each teacher then turns in the plan, marking only their changes to the plan

#### *Collaboration:*

*“[Professional Development] gives us more time to focus on relationships with other teachers and a chance to work with people I never see. Get to see what others are doing and just benefit from interaction with others.”*

#### *Collaboration:*

*We need time to develop lessons in our content areas. Interdisciplinary teams meet daily but each day is dedicated to a different task.*

#### *Implementation*

*Principal Judy~: “Teachers have really tried to put their arms around [the professional development efforts], they are really trying to implement. Teachers enjoy focusing in depth and the increased collegiality. They have seen the improved student learning in certain areas. Kids are doing better with using the strategies.”*

during the three-week cycle. Teachers also fill out an “Analyzing and Reporting Our Data Response Sheet” weekly, which was adapted from a form used by Reading First teachers in the district (see Appendix.) These data are collected and compiled by the Literacy Leadership Team, which analyzes the patterns of use for their own planning of support to teachers and shares the data with all SCR teachers.

Other teachers in the building do not submit implementation logs. Wilson has moved to a process of studying information collected on administrator walkthroughs. Findings from the walkthroughs are routinely shared with the faculty at professional development meetings.

**Formative Data Collection** SCR teachers measure vocabulary growth weekly, fluency and comprehension bi-weekly (Jamestown Timed Readings) and maintain an on-going record of each students independent reading and comprehension of books read (Book Talks), and a record of difficulties demonstrated during oral reading from independent book selections.

*Formative: “I use summarization to study individual and whole class progress. This helps me see progress in black and white – tells me what they know and don’t know and what to do next.” (Teacher)*

Literacy Workshop teachers routinely work with student formative data and use data to plan lessons for the next week.

AEA teams follow a process where they choose a benchmark and then select a formative measure. Teams use a form that guides the teams through a set of questions about students’ responses to instruction. Once a month, every group submits their formative data to the leadership team. Teachers collect building level reading and math pre-tests or quizzes. Soon the district will be using soft ware to analyze student progress three times a year. STAR data are collected three times a year for all students.

### **Summative Data**

ITBS data will be used to evaluate program effectiveness. ITBS is administered in the fall in the Council Bluffs district and the first evaluation will occur mid-year in the 2006-2007 academic year.

All SCR students are also tested pre and post with the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test. Program evaluation data for the first year implementation will be available in June 2006.

### **External Technical Assistance**

Wilson Middle School has had more external technical assistance than many schools implementing the Iowa Professional Development Model. Beverly Showers provided initial training in SCR through the auspices of the Iowa Department of Education. Lynn ~, AEA13, has provided training in Literacy Workshop and Lynn provides continuing training for both literacy initiatives every Monday. The Council Bluffs Community School District has developed training materials and technical assistance for the ASA initiative.

## **D. Some Site Visit Observations/Recommendations**

Implementation of the literacy initiatives is high and was readily apparent during classroom observations. All SCR teachers were implementing the strategies they had planned for the day, as

were Literacy Workshop teachers. Examples of strategies observed include choral reading, Think Aloud, independent reading with Pair Share, pairs working with vocabulary boxes, Book Talks.

ASA teachers, at the moment, are focusing on developing content-specific vocabulary lessons. Examples of strategies observed include the Frayer structure (graphic organizer for teaching vocabulary), compare-contrast, structured summarization, cooperative group work, and non-linguistic representations.

Training/learning opportunities for the ASA teachers need many more demonstrations of the strategies that have been learned. Because the training has occurred over the past three years, both forgetting and “domestication” of strategies has begun. Now is the time to take several strategies and work with them in greater depth.

We observed true faculty concern for student learning and commitment to implementation of PD content. The literacy initiatives, however, are much clearer with respect to the expectations for implementation than is the ASA project. Some of the ASA teams have specific agreements among themselves regarding use of ASA strategies while other teams appear to have none. We like the idea of departments working out implementation plans appropriate for their subject areas but would like to see the PD Leadership Team provide structure in the form of expectations for an implementation and routines for reporting implementation.

The Literacy Leadership Team is fully functioning and doing an exemplary job of leading and managing the literacy initiatives. As we discussed, it needs teacher representation. Teachers on the PD Leadership Team are relatively new and need some instruction on their roles, specifically in the setting of PD and collaborative team agendas, designing formative data collecting and analysis, collecting and summarizing implementation data, etc.